

## **CLIENT CONGRESS FORUM RAISES ADVOCACY AWARENESS**

**By Catherine Bond, LMFT, Director of Empowerment and Advocacy**



More than 600 applicants registered to attend the first Client Congress Forum held Friday, June 28, 2013, at the Cathedral Plaza in downtown Los Angeles. The purpose of the forum was to provide Members and Friends of the Client Congress an opportunity to learn about current advocacy issues and grow their advocacy skills. People participated in the program, networked and visited 14 Resource tables offering information on topics ranging from the LACDMH Genesis Program to Vet to Vet. The Master of Ceremonies, Maria Salinas, encouraged participants to network and take advantage of all resources available at the conference.

Kathleen Austria, Mental Health Deputy to Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, gave the opening remarks. There were two keynote speakers in the morning: Paolo del Vecchio, M.S.W., and Marvin J. Southard, D.S.W., LACDMH Director. Paolo is the Director of the Center for Mental Health Services at SAMHSA and is a self-identified mental health consumer, trauma survivor, and person in recovery from addictions. His presentation was on "Peers and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Health Care: Creating a Shared Vision of Recovery." Dr. Southard spoke on "The Future of Public Mental Health," which includes the development of Health Neighborhoods that offer integrated care as a result of healthcare reform.



The afternoon session began with a panel of the Client Congress Advisory Board (CCAB) Officers: Roy Brown, President, Maria Salinas, Vice President, Llanette Morgan, Corresponding Secretary, and Nettie Vasquez, Recording Secretary. Their topic was “Finding Our Voice, Sharing Our Vision.” After the panel, the attendees participated in roundtable discussions on advocacy issues facilitated by me and CCAB President Roy Brown.

Members and Friends of the Congress who participated in the discussions spoke English, Spanish or Korean, and interpretation was provided. The Client Congress Advisory Board (CCAB) will review the feedback from the Members and Friends who attended the Client Congress Forum and develop advocacy objectives for fiscal year 2013-2014 to be implemented in conjunction with the LACDMH Empowerment & Advocacy Division.

